

Textual Authority in Late Medieval Church Slavonic Translations: The Translator as an Icon Painter

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Most of the texts that have reached us from the Slavic Middle Ages are translations of (Byzantine) Greek religious (mainly liturgical and monastic) texts. It is interesting to look at the often noted but never sufficiently explained shift in metalinguistic tradition and translation practice that has taken place in the course of the 13th and 14th centuries. In this later period, in the so-called Euthymian literary tradition, dissatisfaction with earlier translations instigated a return *ad fontes* and more domesticating translation strategies made way for extremely foreignizing approaches. Many translations from this period bear witness to an extreme literalism and are written in such radically Hellenized Church Slavonic that it has rightly been called a travesty of Greek – sometimes even to the point of incomprehensibility. Many of these texts can be situated in a monastic (Athonite) environment, such as e.g. the 14th-c. *Hexaameron Corpus*, the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, the Palamite cycle.

This paper wants to address the question of textual authority in 'Euthymian' translations, viz. the role of the authoritative status of the source texts and the particular approach to translation as a way to redirect this authority to the translation. A parallel will be drawn with a related tradition of continuity through replication, viz. (Byzantino-Slavic) iconography. In icons as in these translation the hand of the maker – the icon painter or translator – seems to be hidden, while an underlying prototype as the locus of authority and truth – the iconographic model or the source text – is explicitly present. As both icons and these translations seem to relate to their prototypes as imprints or carbon copies (cf. the mandylion-icons, *acheiropoieita*), the prototype cannot be considered fully external to its derivative. It will be argued that this approach fits the context in which these translations are to be situated, viz. late medieval Slavic monasticism (hesychasm).